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Pope Paul on racism

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POPE PAUL ON RACISM

THE CAUSE IS URGENT THE HOUR IS LATE



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POPE PAUL ON RACISM

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May 22, 1974

Address to U.N. Special Committee on Apartheid

We have responded willingly to the request for an audience by the Committee of the United Nations on Apartheid. We are happy to have this occasion to restate the church's position on the great crucial themes of human dignity and the fundamental equality of all men, and, in particular, on the issue of discrimination. This teaching reflects a whole Christian concept of man himself, who is created in God's likeness and redeemed by Christ. It was he who left us both a heritage and a challenge when he said: "You are all brothers" (Mt. 23:8).

Our predecessors in the see of Peter, the vicars of Christ throughout the years, have repeatedly given expression to His teaching in the defense of man. It was Paul III who promoted the dignity of the native peoples of the Americas: their freedom, their right to property (*Pastorale Officium*, 29 May 1537: DS 1495; cf. also Gregory XVI, *In Supremo Apostolatus Fastigio*, December 3, 1839: DS 2745). In modern times our great predecessors Pius XII and John XXIII steadfastly reaffirmed the priceless gospel heritage (cf. Radio Message, December 24, 1942: AAS 35 (1943), p. 19; *Pacem in Terris*, April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 259-260).

Thus we unhesitatingly proclaim once again the dignity of the human person and the brotherhood of all men. True brotherhood takes into account the common origin, nature and destiny of all members of the human family and the equality of their fundamental rights. We find it as relevant today as seven years ago to state: "This equality demands an ever more explicit recognition in civil society of every human being's essential rights . . . consequently, the aspirations of all men desiring to enjoy those rights which flow from their dignity as human persons are wholly legitimate" (Message to Africa: AAS 59 (1967), p. 1082).

And yet as we note with pleasure that there is indeed a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person, and that civilization marches towards the recognition of equality and the freedoms demanded by reason of this human dignity and equality, we must all admit that one of the great paradoxes of our time is that in fact these freedoms are all too frequently restricted, violated and denied.

Various forms of discrimination militate against the rights of individuals and communities and the harmony of society. Antagonisms and rivalries obscure the effective realization of the one united human family under the fatherhood of God. Hatred existing in the hearts of men and manifested in strife still imperils the security, peace and prosperity of peoples.

As we warn of the dangers concomitant with abuses against human dignity, equality and liberty, we reiterate the Church's often-repeated appeal to banish all discrimination, in law or in fact, which is based on "race, origin, color, culture, sex or religion" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 16: AAS 63 (1971), p. 413).

Discrimination takes on many forms. It is present when individuals and entire populations are not granted the right of religious freedom, the "free and normal expression of that most jealously guarded right of the human spirit" (Message for the Day of Peace 1972: AAS 63 (1971), p. 867). It is

likewise present, for example, when the equal dignity of women is not respected. It is present when the migrant worker is looked down upon, when the poor are held down to inhuman conditions of life.

As we rightly recognize the importance of each of these categories, we willingly state that "racial discrimination possesses at the moment a character of very great relevance by reason of the tension which it stirs up both within certain countries and on the international level. Men rightly consider unjustifiable and reject as inadmissible the tendency to maintain or introduce legislation or behavior systematically inspired by racialist prejudice" (*Octogesima Adveniens* 16: AAS 63 (1971), p. 413). What we are repeating now we had said even before, as we stood on African soil: "We deplore the fact that, in certain parts of the world, there persist social situations based upon racial discrimination and often willed and sustained by systems of thought; such situations constitute a manifest and inadmissible affront to the fundamental rights of the human person . . ." (Address to the Parliament of Uganda: AAS 61 (1969), p. 585).

Conditions in the world today prompt us once again to repeat with the same measure of conviction what we said before: "Within a country which belongs to each one, all should be equal before the law, find equal admittance to economic, cultural and social life and benefit from a fair sharing of the nation's riches" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 16: AAS 63 (1971), p. 413). All men must participate in the life of the nation. Power, responsibility and decision-making cannot be the monopoly of one group or race or segment of the people. The message which we offer—and it is at the same time advice, counsel and injunction for Christian consciences—to every group or state or nation is what we have learned from Him whom we represent: "You are all brothers."

In advocating the recognition of the dignity of all men and the protection of their fundamental rights, the Christian message calls for integral human development, which—we have insisted—is "the new name of

peace" (*Populorum Progressio*, 87: AAS 59 (1967), p. 299) and "the indisputable exigency of justice" (Address to the Parliament of Uganda: AAS 61 (1969), p. 582). The Church realizes that the development of peoples involves, besides the equality of races, "the right to aspire to their own legitimate autonomy" (*Ibid.*, p. 584). Our thought on this complex issue is no secret to you. We expressed it when we explained that freedom means "civil independence, political self-determination, emancipation from the domination of other powers . . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 582).

In the question for the attainment of this full measure of human dignity, men must indeed proceed in certain circumstances and historical situations with particular prudence and wisdom. The degree of the gradualness with which they proceed must be in proportion to the urgency; there must be a precise plan with a definite time-table. But the cause is urgent and the hour is late. "Yes," as we said last year, "as long as the rights of all the peoples, among them the right to self-determination and independence, are not duly recognized and honored, there cannot be true and lasting peace, even though the abusive power of arms may for a time prevail over the reactions of those opposed. For as long as, within the individual national communities, those in power do not nobly respect the rights and legitimate freedoms of the citizens, tranquility and order (even though they can be maintained by force) remain nothing but a deceptive and insecure sham, no longer worthy of a society of civilized beings" (Address to the College of Cardinals, December 21, 1973: AAS 66 (1974), p. 21). Therefore, from our vantage point we earnestly call upon all men of good will to recognize this and to give heed to the just yearnings of individuals and peoples.

In the solution of these pressing problems, the only possible means are the means indicated by the Christian message which claims without reservation the need to give witness to, promote and effect justice as brotherhood, as urged by the love and the creative capacity of man, but with violence excluded. On another occasion we noted:

"In the face of deplorable delays, or even of continuous disregard of the problems, the temptation to violent means . . . may become very strong. But violence as a solution is illusory. Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile violence with the righteousness that it is intent upon proclaiming or defending" (Letter to Cardinal Conway, March 6, 1972: AAS 64 (1972), pp. 312-313). No, we repeat, violence is not an acceptable solution. It must give way to reason, mutual trust, sincere negotiations and fraternal love.

The subject of our consideration today has vast ramifications and it is not possible to speak of all of them. The theme we have touched upon calls to mind also the need to terminate class struggle and hatred at every level and in every form. The rights of minorities call out for protection as do the rights of the poor, the handicapped, the incurably ill and all those who live at the margin of society and are without voice. Above all the precious right to life—that most fundamental of all human rights—must be affirmed anew, together with the condemnation of that massive aberration which is the destruction of innocent human life, at whatever stage it may be, through the heinous crimes of abortion or euthanasia.

Yes, it is our mission to call upon all men to give recognition to God's dominion—to whom be glory for ever and ever. (Gal. 1:6)—and to banish all discrimination in recognition of the dignity of every man. To all men of good will we repeat again, and again: "You are all brothers." □

